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THE
Charge of Scandal,
And giving
OFFENCE
BY
CONFORMITY,
Refelled,
And Reflected back upon
SEPARATION.

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And that place of *St. Paul*, 1 *Cor.* 10. 32. that
hath been so usually urged by Dissenters in
this Case, asserted to its true Sence, and
vindicated from favouring the end for which
it hath beed quoted by them

By Henry Westcott
Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the
Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.

L O N D O N :
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STEARNS

1. The first part of the report is a general statement of the purpose of the study and the objectives to be achieved. This is followed by a brief review of the literature on the subject, and a statement of the scope of the study.

SECRET

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To the
Christian-Reader.

Thou art not ignorant (I suppose) that this Argument hath been handled by a far better Pen; an Author that doth every thing he undertakes with that accuracy of Judgement, and strength of Reason, that becomes a person of his Character; and therefore mayest wonder what so mean a Scribe hath to do after him.

I have but this Answer onely to give thee; that it is neither affectation, nor conceit of this Paper, that is the cause. This Discourse was shewed to some persons, both friends to the world and the Author, who was wholly ignorant that the Subject was undertaken by another, and was thought fit to be stay'd till it was seen what that

To the Christian Reader.

Discourse expected then would be ; with a design to suppress it wholly, had the Method or the Management been near alike : which because it was not, and because the same thing that hits one fancy, may not do so to another, or not to all, it was determined to venture this to the Publick also.

Which the Author doth with Prayer for, and true Charity unto all that need such Discourses ; beseeching God, that they may honestly and impartially consider what hath been offered to them of late, to satisfy all their most material Scruples and Objections, and that they may find a suitable effect upon their own minds.

THE
Charge of Scandal,
And giving OFFENCE by
CONFORMITY
REFELLED.

THere are very few things within the Sphere of Christian Religion, that more trouble and distract the thoughts of men, than how to govern themselves, and order their actions with respect to things that are called *Indifferent*.

In things that are essentially good or evil, or are made so by some plain Command or Prohibition of our great Lawgiver, all Parties are soon agreed; and there needs not any question or dispute between them in these. The Rule is plain, and (supposing men honest) there cannot be any great mistake about them.

But in things that are left wholly undetermined by God, and neither directly, nor by just and natural consequence either enjoined or prohibited by any Law of his, there men sail not by so plain a Compass, but have a larger Scope, and may more easily mistake their Course.

It cannot therefore be less than a good Service to men,

to

The Charge of Scandal, and

to direct them safely in this Unbeaten track, and to prescribe to them such Rules, to which if they carefully attend, they can never fall into any dangerous error.

This is our Apostles charitable design in this Chapter; to which I shall have a respect in managing this present Argument, viz. 1 Cor. 10. and by governing our selves by the measures of his discourse in it, we may be able to hit those great Rules of our actions in these things.

The Apostles discourse is indeed but of one particular instance of these, i. e. the eating, or not eating things that had been offered in Sacrifice by the Gentiles to their *Demons*; which I shall have occasion to explain at large hereafter to you.

But it is equally applicable to all things of the like Indifferent nature. And there are two Rules laid down by him there, which men ought to govern themselves by in the use of such things.

1. The First is the Glory of God, v. 31. *Whatsoever therefore ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God*; i. e. whatever ye do in these things, be sure you have respect to the Law and Will of God, and take heed that you violate none of the divine Commandments, either by what you do, or what you refuse to do in things of this nature. For this is the true notion and meaning of *doing all to the glory of God*, i. e. Keeping us close to the observance of those Laws and Rules that he hath commanded us. For then God is most truly glorified by us, when we express a great sense of his Sovereignty and Laws in all that we do. But this by the way.

The 2d Rule is Charity and respect to the benefit and advantage of those we converse with, and live among; that we neither grieve nor injure them by any thing that we do, or neglect to do: and this is the meaning of these

these words, so often quoted by our dissenting Brethren :
*Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles,
nor to the Church of God.*

This is that Rule of our actions in all indifferent things, which I have chosen to consider in this discourse : and the rather, because we have some contest with our dissenting Brethren about it.

There hath been great talk about Scandal and giving Offence to weak and tender Consciences, by Conformity and Compliance with all those things which the Church of *England* requires in her Liturgie : and amongst all the other Arguments and Pretences against it, this hath been prest to serve in the Cause, either to add some real weight to the rest, or at least to add to their number.

Though (to tell you plainly) I think it is onely to make a shew, and to render the bulk of their Exceptions the bigger, that this is summoned to the Muster, and not for any real weight that there is in it to serve the Cause.

However, whatever there is in it, a great noise is made with it ; and as a mighty noise hath been made about Scandal, and great pains used to wrest the notion of it to serve mens purposes in these things : so great art hath been employed to accommodate it to the present purpose, and to fright men with the guilt and danger of it, from complying with the Institutions of the Church, which (as is pretended) are so very great a Scandal and Offence to weak Consciences.

Two great and popular Pleas against the Liturgie of the Church of *England*, and the Ceremonies retained by it, have been these : tenderness and scruples of Conscience, in some ; and fear of Scandal and giving Offence to such, in others.

Some men have pleaded their own Scruples, and want
of

The Charge of Scandal, and

of sufficient Conviction and Information, and excused their omission of these things, from that saying of the Apostle, *Rom. 14. 23. Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.*

And some have alledged their fear of Scandal and offending others, and pleaded that in bar of their compliance, from these words of the same Apostle, *Give none offence, &c.*

How much the sence of the first place is mistaken, and how false the consequence that is made from it is, I am not now obliged to shew. My Province at this time is about the second, this place that I have now quoted: in order to which, I intend to do these two things.

1. Shew that this place is not at all concerned in our present Question, nor will serve that purpose that the Dissenters from our Church alledge it for.

2. That if it were, it would conclude against them and their practice, in the present Case betwixt us.

1. I begin with the first, which is to shew, that this place is not concerned in our present Case, nor pertinently urged by our Brethren against their Conformity to the present Rites and Usages of the Church.

And this I might do, from two things mistaken greatly in the application of this Text.

1. The true notion of *Scandal* and *Offence* here mentioned.

2. The nature of the things to which it is applied, which is vastly different from what men scruple or forbear in our Case.

1. From the true notion of *Scandal* and *Offence* that is mentioned in this place, and in many other places in the New Testament.

I do not intend here a large Discourse of the nature of Scandal in the general, or a removing and rectifying those many common mistakes in the world about it; but only

only to observe so much as will be sufficient to my present purpose.

1. Then I observe, that as there are onely two notions of Scandal in the New Testament, so there are onely two Cases in which men are properly and primarily capable of being guilty of it, I mean in giving it to others.

1. The first notion of Scandal is, That it is a Snare or a Gin, by which men are intrapped and drawn into some plain sin and wickedness. In which sence it is used in many places, and particularly in that famous Speech of our Saviours, *Matth. 18. 6. to 10.*

And men do then give offence, or scandalize others, when they do that which directly and in its own nature tends to induce others either to do that which God hath forbidden, and is a sin; or omit that which he hath commanded, and is a plain Duty: both which men may do several ways, which it is not now so very needful to reckon up singly.

2. The second notion of Scandal is, That it is some just cause of grief or trouble to others in their Christian course, and that which hinders them from walking in it with that chearfulness and security that they otherwise would.

According to which sence it is rendred *Offence* in this, and many other Texts of Scripture, *i. e.* some just cause of offence, of trouble or grief given to another by something that he sees us either omit, or do.

In this sence it is used in many places of the New Testament, not for that which is a direct occasion of another mans sin, but a just cause of his grief and sorrow, and discouragement in the way of Duty: So it is used particularly, *Joh. 16. 1. and Rom. 14. 13.* it is expressed by *grieving.*

And in this sence men give offence to others, when

either by doing, or neglecting something themselves, they give just cause of sorrow or grief to others, and discourage them in their Christian course, and occasion to them some trouble and grief of mind, that otherwise might be free from.

2. Having observed this therefore, I proceed in the second place to observe, that neither of these notions of Scandal can be accommodated to our present case; nor can we be said to give offence to others, in either of these senses, by conforming to the Institutions and Rites of the Church of *England*.

1. Not in the first sense; for that can onely be in one, or both of these two cases: either first, by doing that which is essentially and in its own nature evil and a sin; Or secondly, by doing that which is directly a temptation and a snare to induce another to do that which is a sin.

Now if it can be shewn, that complying with the Rites and Service of the Church of *England* is giving offence in either of these senses, then I here profess, I will my self immediately turn their Proselyte, and renounce Conformity, and protest against it for ever.

1. It hath scarce ever yet been so much as intimated, that the Church of *England* requires any thing as a condition of Communion with her, that is essentially evil. None of our adversaries (that I know of) have yet dared to charge her Doctrine with falshood, or her Discipline with any thing that is in it self evil: And when any shall adventure to do it, I doubt not but he will find enough to enter the lists with him.

Even our bitterest Enemies of the Romish Communion have dared to charge us no further in either of these, but onely that we are defective in both, and reject many things which the Church of Christ (as they pretend) hath believed and practised in the ancient and primitive ages of it.

They

They would rather chuse to call us Schismatics, than Hereticks, or to prove us Hereticks; not because we believe or teach any things for necessary Doctrines which are false, but rather because we do not teach or believe all things that are Christian and true.

Neither do they charge our Liturgy, and Service, or Form of Worship, with any thing that is materially evil, no nor redundant, but onely deficient in many Usages and Rites, which they pretend to be Apostolical. And if our own Brethren must be more spiteful and bitter against us than our worst Adversaries, let them look to it, that even they become not their accusers at the great day.

But yet (thanks be to God) they have not adventured to do this, and will be unsuccessful enough when they do it; and therefore themselves free us from giving any offence in our Conformity, in this sence of giving offence, *i. e.* doing any thing which is formally a Sin our selves, and thereby inducing others into the same evil by joyning with us.

2. Neither secondly do I see any one sin, that Conformity is directly introductive of, or a temptation unto; and I will believe it will puzzle the most curious and inquisitive to find out any such.

I have so much charity for my dear Mother the Church, and so much duty (I thank God) yet left in me, as to dare to justifie her from this imputation. I am sure she intends no sin in what she doth, nor knows of any evil, that her Communion will betray any man into.

All that she designs in her Doctrine, is to teach *the truth as it is in Jesus*, and to keep close to that *Symbol of Faith, which was once delivered unto the Saints.*

And what she intends and aims at in her Liturgie and Discipline, is by the one to keep men from innovating
and

and corrupting that Faith, or debauching it in their manners, and detaining it in unrighteousness: And by the other, to direct them to worship God in such a way, as is suitable to his own nature, and to the Principles of such a holy Religion; and thereby conciliate that grace that may enable them to live so, as the Worship of such a God, and the Belief of such a Religion require, and oblige them to do.

I must confess, in one thing the Church of *England* may be an occasion of a great deal of sin in the world; but it is such as will as little advantage our Brethren to have it granted, as it will be any disparagement, or disadvantage to be caused by it.

I mean, in being an occasion of all that sin and guilt that all those bring upon themselves, that rail and cry out so much upon it; that separate and divide from it, and studiously maintain and keep up an unreasonable and downright Schism against it.

But certainly all men will feel that this is an offence only taken, and not given; and ought no more to be objected against the Church, than Murther and Adultery, Theft and Robbery ought to be charged upon the Laws of God, that declare the same to be sin. Were there no such thing as the Constitution of a Church, these men would not be guilty of Schism, and unjust Separation from it. But so, if there were no Law, there would be no transgression; and Adulterers may as well accuse the Law for their sin in one case, as Schismatics can accuse the Constitution of the Church in the other. They are both in this case equally culpable, *i. e.* indeed not at all.

In a word, and to conclude this Period; if Piety, and becoming expressions of Devotion in the publick Worship of God: If Gravity, Decency, and Order in the Offices of Religion; And if engaging men to a due respect

spect and regard to the rules of the Gospel, be sins or evils to be eschewed and dreaded by men; then I will grant that Conformity to the Church of *England* may possibly give offence (in this sence of giving of it) but if not, I do not see any reason to apprehend or fear any danger at all of it.

By these considerations, it will appear, we are free from giving offence by our Conformity to the Rules of our Church, in this first sence of Scandal and giving Offence.

2. I proceed therefore now to enquire, if we cannot clear our selves sufficiently from it in the second notion of these things also.

And this I think will best and most plainly be determined, by considering what can be thought just cause of sorrow and grief to a good man, or a reasonable discouragement or hinderance to him in his way of Duty. I mean still, cause of these given to him by another.

Now these, I think, I may reduce pretty safely to these three Heads.

1. Some dishonour offered to God and his Religion.

2. The Wickedness and Profaneness of men.

3. The making the way of Religion and Duty more cumbersome, and difficult than otherwise it would be.

These are great and just causes of offence and grief to a good man. It cannot but greatly afflict a good man to behold his God (whom he adores, and honours, and loves above all things) affronted and dishonoured, his Laws violated, his Authority contemned and trampled upon by daring and foolish men: *Rivers of waters*
(faith.

The Charge of Scandal, and

(saith the holy Psalmist) *run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.* Psal. 119. 136.

And it cannot but be cause of the like sorrow to such a man, to see other men, for whom he hath a great and concerning charity, and whom he loves as his own soul, to live in sin, and a contempt of God, to wound and destroy their precious Souls, and to provide matter for eternal torments.

And any thing that discourageth a man in the way of his Duty, or renders it more perplexed and troublesome to him, may be justly called an offence or grief to him. I do not easily understand how this kind of offence can properly be said to be given any other, but by some of these ways.

Now let our debate be determined by these things, and let the issue be, Whether Conformity can be grieving others upon any of these accounts.

It cannot, I am sure, be said, or at least nothing like a proof be offered, that we offend men hereby, because we either do any dishonour to God, or to his holy Religion by it: It is much truer, that we bring honour and reputation to both by it.

To God, by taking the best course we can pitch upon to secure the Solemnity and Decency of his Worship: And to Religion, by taking care that all the great Services of it be performed decently and to edification, and not profaned by the ignorance, or temerity of every bold and unskilful undertaker.

2. Nor secondly can it be pretended that hereby we let men be spectators of our wickedness and profaneness, and so grieve and make sad the hearts of good men, while they see us without any fear of God before our eyes.

I have that charity for the modesty and integrity of our Dissenting Brethren, that they will not call our Worship

ship Idolatry, and the service of *Baal* any longer; though it cannot be dissembled, that a great part of the less-discerning Rabble have been taught by them, so to account and think of it. But if any have been misled into such an Opinion, I would beg them to come, and behold our way of publick Worship, for their better conviction.

3. No, nor thirdly do I see how it can be any offence upon its making the way of Religion and Duty more cumbersome, or difficult to others, than it would be.

It would be a hard matter for any to shew where he is hindered from being good, by seeing others conformable to the Church; or what obstruction that casts in his way of Duty. I will at any time undertake to shew, that it may be an help and advantage to him, and a furtherance to him in the way of Religion and Salvation; but let or hinderance it can be none.

If it be pretended, that by this we make Religion cumbersome, and clog that with Rites and Ceremonies, that is a plain and easie thing; I grant the Objection were reasonable, and the Charge of giving offence undeniable, were it either so as it began to be of old in St. *Augustin's* time, or is at present in the *Roman-Church*, clogged with so many antick and garish Ceremonies, that it requires a great deal of study to be an exact Ritualist, and is a thousand times harder to remember, and observe all the Rites and Modes of any Service and Office in Religion, than to do the thing a hundred times over.

But let me beg men to consider whether this Charge can be just against a Church and its Liturgy, which enjoyn but three Ceremonies, against which the Dissenters themselves can object, and these too not in the same, but so many distinct Services, and which are little more than barely determining those circumstances

The Charge of Scandal, and

of Habit and Gesture, which are natural and necessary to all our actions.

If these things can be thought to make the Practice and Services of Religion burthensome, then any of the Postures in which our Brethren perform their Worship will make that so too; and then the Directory will be as chargeable and faulty in this, as the Liturgy.

These things will be sufficient, upon this first way that I proposed, to shew, that conforming to the Institutions of the Church is not concerned in any thing the Apostle speaks in this place, nor can come under his notion of giving offence to any, which he speaks against in it.

I will not deny; but that some may be offended and troubled at it. It is too visible how much some men are troubled to see a Church constituted among us; to behold it protected by Law and Power, and to see so great a deference and respect paid unto it, and its way of Worship (as blessed be God is at present) by multitudes both of great and good men. I do not doubt but it is greatly maligned and envied by men, and it is little less than a continual trouble and grief to them. It is contrary to their private Interest, and so long as it is so, their designs and aims will never be effected.

But so ill men are troubled at a good Government; and Thieves and Robbers may be vexed that Honest men are secured from them; and these may as well cry out, that the Laws and the Government are an offence to them, as others may, that they are offended at the Church and Conformity.

Sure we know things better than to call every thing a Scandal that any man is vexed or troubled at: If we must acknowledge that an offence, or forbear doing every thing for fear of Scandal, that every ill designing man is pleased to take exceptions against; it is more than pro-

probable we must do nothing at all, nor venture to undertake any thing, till we see whether all persons will be pleased with it or not : We must not call every thing an offence that pleaseth not the humour of every man ; for then nothing can avoid that character.

But this is not enough to say in this matter ; for it will serve us much further , not onely to justifie our selves from this imputation, but to reflect it back upon those that charge us : For when we have well considered things, we shall find, that the Scandal will fall upon our Accusers ; and not Conformity, but Separation will be found to be the giving Offence, and that in both the notions of giving it that have been named.

Separation is indeed the Scandal, as being both an evil in it self, and that which betrays others into many evils.

If ever there were such a thing as Schism in the world, or if the Separation of the *Donatists*, or any that were ever made from the Communion of a National Church were a Schism, I think it hath been sufficiently proved on our behalf , that the present Separation from our Church is really a Schism.

And if Schism be a damnable sin, (and so it is, if we will judge either by the Doctrines of the Apostles, or their best Successors, yea and few sins greater) then we shall need no other argument to prove Separation to be indeed the Scandal, and that in the greatest notion of Scandal too.

And we sadly see what great mischiefs it is introductive of ; what uncharitableness and railing, what pride and censoriousness it betrays men into. Schism was scarce ever content to be alone. Men think it not enough to separate from the Communion of the Church, unless they go to justifie their Separation, by aspersing what they separated from ; and so men are inevitably betrayed

into envyings and bitter railings, into strife and contention, and all those evils that such things are naturally productive of.

And I am sure it is a fore grief and trouble, and an offence (in the second notion of it) to many good men, who cannot but be grieved greatly.

To see the Institutions of Christ so disregarded, the great Duties and Services of Religion so slighted and neglected; and to behold the Peace and Welfare of the Church (which cost the Saviour of the world so dear, and is so greatly beloved by him) so very little consulted, or rather purposely betrayed.

To behold men allow themselves (nay glory) in such damnable sins; destroy their Souls by the guilt of them, and wilfully forfeit the benefit of all that Christ hath done, and suffered for them.

And lastly, to see the way of Religion so perplexed with idle Questions, and made intricate by needless Disputes; and to see so many unreasonable Controversies started, and such eager Quarrels amongst Christians, which the best men sometimes have much ado to weather, and get over so as they should do.

These are the things that make many *sad*, and aking *hearts* among those *whom God hath not made sad*, and these are the effects of the sad Divisions and Separations among us. These therefore are the Scandal, and the things that so much offend, and these are the *Divisions for which there are such searchings of heart* at this day.

I would to God some men would seriously consider things, they might then possibly begin to reflect upon themselves and their own actions, and perhaps see cause to take some part of that reproach upon themselves, which they are pleased so prodigally to cast upon us.

2. But I have another thing yet, to shew the error of applying this Speech of the Apostle to our case:

For

For as there is a mistake in the notion of *Scandal* and *Offence*, so there is too, in those things to which the *giving offence* here relates ; and they are vastly different from those things in the Church, that we conform unto, by which the offence is pretended to be given.

The difference I mean is this ; that however they may be things in their own nature equally indifferent, yet the supervening command from lawful Authority may make a vast difference between them. Those things to which this Text relates, were indifferent, and undetermined too, no humane Law had taken cognizance of them ; but the Institutions or Ceremonies of the Church, in which it is pretended we give offence, are things already determined by the Laws of men, and such as a lawful Authority hath bound us to the practice of.

I shall not need to have any controverſie, I hope, with any about the nature of them ; nor will any of the tragical Outcries againſt them prove them eſſentially evil. Though ſome men have been taught to call them *Rags of Rome*, *Instances of Superſtition*, and *Relicks of Idolatry* ; theſe are words of courſe, and arts of railing, which proclaim indeed the rancour and malice of ſome mens ſpirits, but do not change the nature of things. And certainly a ſtranger that ſhould hear all this outcry, and at laſt find the things declaimed ſo againſt are but pure Modes and Circumſtances of things, he would either greatly queſtion the judgement and honeſty of ſome men ; or at leaſt conclude, that a little thing will ſerve thoſe men to quarrel with, that are reſolved either to find faults, or to make them.

2. Nor ſecondly ſhall I need here to diſpute whether ſuch things may be enjoined by a lawful Authority in the Service of God : This hath been done fully already by a more learned hand ; to which I have nothing here to adde, but that our Brethren, and all the ſeveral de-

nominations of them, do the same thing themselves, and sufficiently confute their own Objection. So hard is it for them to frame any argument against us, which may not like a two-edged weapon wound themselves.

And time was, when some of them found it sadly true; the Arguments that they had used against the Church of *England*, others galled their own sides with; and they were forced to think those answers good for them, which they will not allow to be so for us against them. And what dealing that is, I leave others to judge!

3. No nor thirdly do I think it worth the while, to stay to answer that trifling Objection, That this command of men alters the nature of the things; and sure the Church of *England* thinks them more than Indifferent, or else it would not lay so much weight upon them, nor make so very great a stir about them.

It is a great mistake, to think that the commanding of things indifferent makes any alteration in the nature of them; it alters them indeed with respect to us and our practice, but the things remain the same; and the Church commands them as things fitting to be done, but Indifferent still in their nature; and so the Church of *England* declares them to be, after her commanding them: And her publick Declarations and Rubricks sufficiently acquit her from all such thought; and if men will not believe her own Protestations, but still pretend that she believes contrary to what she solemnly professeth, it is but another instance of some mens ingenuity and candour towards her, and needs not be counted strange in this Age.

Nor is her standing so stiff (as men speak) for these things, any argument of her thinking otherwise of them: for however a Ceremony be in it self a small thing, yet Faction and Disobedience is a great one, and ought with all care to be suppressed; and that Church needs not
be

be blamed for its sharpness against Dissentions about these, which hath already by sad experience found, that gratifying Faction in these, hath in the issue been the utter overthrow of her whole Constitution.

If any Church may be excused in this, certainly this may, which hath already felt the smart of Indulging in them; and cannot but be concerned, when it sees the same practices pursued again; and that too, by those very men who trampled upon her with so much cruelty and scorn in the late time of her visitation.

The beginning of strife (saith Solomon) is as when one letteth out a River: and so we have found Faction in these things to be also; and therefore no wonder if the wisdom of the Church apply it self with so much care, and quickness to obstruct the smallest beginnings in that, as men do to repair the least breach in those Banks, which keep in the waters of the other.

4. Nor fourthly do I think I have any pertinent occasion here to assert the obligation of humane Laws, or to dispute whether they oblige the Consciences of men in things that God hath left undetermined: We need but consult Scripture for this, which will be plain, so long as the 13 Chapter of the Epistle to the *Romans*, and the first Epistle of *St. Peter* shall remain in the Canon, and not be expunged utterly by those men, that truly would not be much more injurious to it in this instance, than they are in some others.

But were there no Scripture for it, I suppose we should not need to dispute it with any men, that ever are in Authority. There are few of these that will permit their own Authority to be disputed, or Conscience pleaded against it, by their Children or Servants, or those that they have the conduct of.

And we are beholding to our Brethren for letting us know their minds in this: For no men have been more

rigorous in exacting obedience to all their Ordinances, and reproaching and punishing all that dissented from them, as Enemies to God and Christ, than they know who in times past were.

Never were Institutions of men magnified more for promoting the honour of God, exalting the Kingdom and Scepter of Christ, nor men charged more strictly in point of Conscience with obedience to them. So that the crying out against *becoming the servants of men*, is but an artifice to pull down Government, which when men have once leaped into, they will by no means endure to be used against themselves.

5. But that which I am more directly concerned here to shew is, that the things related to in this Text were not onely indifferent, but undetermined too: I mean, no Law had been made by the Church about them one way or other. The truth of which it concerns me to make out, not onely to serve my present purpose, but because it may be something questioned, from what we read *Acts 15. 29.* where among the Canons of that Apostolick Council, this is the first; *That ye abstain from meats offered to Idols*: which seems to be the very thing that the Apostle is discoursing of in this place.

And first, it cannot be denied, that in the beginning of the Apostles Discourse upon these things, from *v. 14.* to *v. 25.* the same things are related unto, that are prohibited by that Canon of the Council; *i. e.* the eating in the Idolatrous Feasts of the Heathen, and of thole meats which they knew were by that Rite offered in Sacrifice unto their Idols. For the Heathen Sacrifices were not finished onely at their Altar, but the Solemnity was continued and compleated by their eating and drinking together upon the remainders of what they had actually offered and consumed in Sacrifice: Just as some of the Jewish Sacrifices (we know) were, from whom

whom the Heathen transcribed many of their practices, aping them in almost all their Institutions.

2. But then secondly, that which he takes occasion to discourse of afterwards, and to which this Speech immediately relates, seems to be very different from what he had been speaking of before, and which is the thing prohibited by the Council of the Apostles.

Which will appear sufficiently, from these two Considerations.

1. That the Apostle here takes upon him a liberty to indulge a Latitude in these things; which be sure he would never have done, had it been in that very Case, that the Apostles had determined before.

And this we may be the more certain of, by considering the circumstances of that whole affair, which (so much as concerns our present business) was briefly thus: The Jewish Converts retained a great veneration for the Ceremonial Law, to which they had been inured, and educated in the observation of: these being interspersed abroad in many places, where many of the Heathens were converted to Christianity, were greatly offended with that liberty, which they saw the others took in the use of those meats which their Law prohibited as unclean.

This caused hot Contests, and sharp Disputes between the two Parties, to the breach of Christian Communion, and the great Scandal of their Religion. The Apostles therefore are consulted in this great affair; and having maturely considered, and canvassed the matter, determine onely to restrain the liberty that the Gentile-Converts took, in these three instances: *To abstain from things offered to Idols, and from things Strangled, and from Blood.*

St. Paul, as he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, so he was the great Agent for them in this business, and the chief

chief person that carried these Constitutions of the Apostles unto their Churches; of which at this time the Church of *Corinth* was one principal, and most considerable.

Now it is not to be supposed that the Apostle would carry this Constitution and Order to them, which they so joyfully and thankfully embraced (saith St. *Luke*) and afterwards presently would take upon him to dispense with the strict observation of, and to grant a great Indulgence and Latitude in.

This would be the ready way to expose himself and his Doctrine too, to contempt and censure, and to give cause for a sharper reproof of himself, than he gave to St. *Peter*, for a lesser matter than this was.

So that we may be sure, the particular matter here related unto, was not the Case which the Canon of the Apostles had regulated, but that it was some other thing which had not been determined by them.

2. And this we may collect also from the Phrase in which he discourseth this matter here in this Text: *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for Conscience sake*, v. 25. and, *If any of them that believe not, bid you to a feast, καλᾶ ὑμᾶς, invite you to an entertainment* [for there is no *ἰορτὴ* in the Greek] and ye be disposed to go, *whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake*, v. 27.

By both which expressions it is plain, that the Apostle here is discoursing of another matter than what was enjoyed by the Canon, or at least of the same thing under a very different denomination and circumstance from that it is considered in there. For *meat bought in the Shambles*, and eating in the common entertainments of their Heathen Neighbours, are plainly different from the notion of *things offered to Idols*, taken notice of by the Canon.

And

And this whole matter will be made plain, by giving an account of it, and shewing wherein the *things offered to Idols* intended by the Apostles, and those discountred of by the Apostle in this place, do differ.

The *things offered to Idols*, forbidden by that Council were such, part whereof was not onely offered in Sacrifice, but was solemnly eaten afterwards as the Idols meat; and the whole Feast continued as a solemn act of Religion and Sacrifice, (as we know it was) and performed not onely as a Rite of confederating with the Idol, but of being more closely united unto him, and receiving a divine *afflatus*, and influence from him.

And although the Idol to which this was done, was really nothing, and the whole performance a meer vanity, having no real foundation at all in nature, and so possibly these meats might have been safely partaken of, by those that were well instructed, and knew these things: Yet the Apostles thought fit to forbid them, for the fore-mentioned reason of giving offence to the *Jews*; and St. Paul enlargeth their reason in this Chapter; because it was a *confederating with Devils*, and being *partakers at the table of Devils*, which he condemns as hugely unbecoming them that eat at the Lords Table, *vers. 20, 21.*

Grotius is so exact in this matter, as to tell us there were two ways by which men might eat of things sacrificed to Idols, in the sense that the Apostles mean.

1. *Vel aliquid a Tabulâ, &c. i.e.* when at their publick Feasts they sent some part off the Table to be offered solemnly to the Idol, and to entitle him to the whole Feast.

2. *Vel ab Aris ad Mensam desertis*; or when they took some considerable portion from the Altar, and sed upon it at the Table, as part of the Idols portion, as was hinted before.

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Now for the Christians to be present at, and to partake of these things, was that which the Apostles forbid in that Canon; and which St. Paul also is so sharp upon, from 14 to 24 of this Chapter.

But that which he speaks of afterwards, is vastly different from it, and plainly means, either that part of the Offering which they afterwards spent in their ordinary meals, or which was publicly sold afterwards in the Shambles.

The first of these is easily understood, and was common among them, to offer some part of the Sacrifice to their Idols, and to reserve the rest for their own common use; not looking upon it as sacred, and the Idols portion, as in some great and solemn Sacrifices they did; but that which was truly their own, and at their own disposal, especially having given a part of it to their Gods.

The other, *i. e.* what was sold in the Shambles, Critics give two accounts of:

1. It was either that which the Butcher sold, part of which he himself had offered to the Idol, before he brought the rest to the Shambles. *Vel à Macellario, qui ante quam ad marcellum carnes ferret, aliquid de Aram in dedisset.*

2. Or that part which belonged to the Priests, and which they often sold; having (it's probable) either more than they could spend themselves; or perhaps having a mind to exchange it for other meat, which they might purchase with the money they sold it for. *Vel à Sacerdotibus, qui partes quæ ipsis cederent, venderent,* saith the same Author.

Now these were the meats about which the Apostles had made no order at all. So that men were at their liberty to buy and eat them if they pleased, without asking any questions, or troubling themselves with any scruples of Conscience about them.

And

And which the Apostle commands them to abstain then onely from, when knowing what they were ~~at~~ their eating them might wound the Conscience of another, and they might *give offence thereby either to the Jews, or to the Gentiles, or to the Church of God.* To the *Jews*, by seeing them make so little a matter of Idolatry: to the *Gentiles*, by encouraging and confirming them in that Idolatry, which they ought by all means to seek to wean them from: and to the *Church of God*, by seeing them so careless and regardless of the good and benefit of others, and without all charity to them.

By all which I hope it is sufficiently clear, that these things to which this Speech relates, were not onely indifferent in their nature, but undetermined also as to their use, no Law having passed one way or other upon them.

Now this makes them vastly different from the things scrupled among us, and by conformity to which Offence is pretended to be given: For the use of these is already determined, and several Laws both of the Church and State, both of the Spiritual and Temporal power, have passed upon them.

So that how indifferent soever they may be in themselves, yet it is not indifferent to us whether we observe them or not; but it is now matter of Obedience, and plain Duty; and these things are tied upon the Conscience, as strongly as any matter of humane command is or can be.

And therefore in these we cannot shew favour and indulgence to others if we would; for we our selves are under Authority, and bound up by the Laws of those above us. We have not the power of doing or forbearing, nor can we now abstain for fear of offending another man's Conscience, without grievously wounding and worse offending of our own; and whatever may be

the consequence of our Conformity, as to another man, yet we certainly know, the neglect of it will be a downright sin, and a grievous guilt unto our selves.

So that in this matter the fear of giving offence to others is impertinent, a Snare, and a direct Temptation; and as improperly urged against Conformity, as it would be against any other Duty how necessary soever, to tell us that there are a great many men that will be offended with our doing of it. In this and all such cases, we stand immediately responsible unto God, and may justly retort that so much abused and mistaken Apology of the Apostles, *Whether it be not right to obey God, rather than regard men, judge ye.*

2. But there is a second thing yet incumbent upon me, and that is to shew, that supposing the Text were pertinently urged against Conformity, and there were a real possibility of giving offence by it, yet it would not serve that purpose that it is produced for by our Dissenting Brethren, but on the contrary make very much against them.

And this I shall endeavour to make good, by considering who the persons are that the Apostle here cautions us against *giving offence* unto; not onely the *Jews*, nor onely the *Gentiles*, nor *both* these onely, but *the Church of God.*

From whence, before I come to the main Improvement of this place against the purpose and practice of our Dissenting Brethren, we may take occasion to consider what the object of Scandal is, and who they are that men ought especially to regard in their cares not to give it.

At the time of the Apostles writing this, there were three different sorts of men that might be offended with eating things offered to Idols: the *Jews*, the *Gentiles*, and the body of Christians, which he here calls *the Church of God.* In

In analogy to which, there are, and always will be, different Parties among which men converse: Upon which account it will concern us to enquire, what our respects to them in this matter ought to be, and whether we ought to make any difference among them. And this we may resolve our selves in, by considering the Cases that concern us; which I think are onely these two.

1. When we perceive, or have reason to think, that what we are going to do will offend all Parties equally, then no doubt but we ought to forbear it. This was plainly the case here.

The *Jews* might be prejudiced against Christianity by this practice, seeing its Professors make so little a matter of Idolatry, which their Law so strictly prohibited, and God had always declared himself so severe against.

The *Gentiles* might be encouraged and confirmed in their Idolatry, by seeing men of the most holy Religion (as they called themselves) consent with them in it.

And the *Church* might be offended too; by seeing her Members have so little a regard to her Constitutions, and the plain Canons of her great Founders.

And therefore they ought to be extreamly careful and cautious what they did in this nice point; and so ought we always to be in such cases.

2. But secondly, it may so happen, that what we do may onely offend some. These different Parties may have different apprehensions of the same thing. Some may think it lawful, or a Duty; others may scruple it, or condemn it as a sin. Now in this case it will concern us to consider how we ought to govern our selves, and our actions, and what difference to make in our respects to men.

And

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And the Apostles Rule in this Text, will be a safe measure and direction to us, especially it *Ecumenius* his Note be true, as it commonly is in all places where a Climax or Gradation is used, as it seems plainly to be in this place: His words are these; *Ὁρᾷ δὲ τὸ μείζον ἔχοντες ἑπὶ, &c.* consider what the Apostle saith. how he puts the chief thing last, and makes *giving offence to the Church of God* that which especially we ought to have a care of: and he gives this reason for the equity of this Rule, *καὶ γὰρ τῆς ἄλλης ἀφίλκεται πρὸς ἑαυτὸν τὴν πίσιν, ἢ μὴ τῆς ἀδελφῆς διώξιν.* it concerns us to endeavour to win others unto the Faith, but by no means to offend and grieve those that already profess it. And certainly nothing can be more just and reasonable than this is.

So that the sum of this advice is plainly this; You ought, as near as you can, to do nothing to offend any; but however, take care not to offend the Church: You ought to have a charitable respect to all particular persons, of what denomination soever; whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*; but especially to the *Church*, and never to give offence to that by any thing that you do.

Now this will be a clear guide to us in our present case: and not onely acquit Conformity, from all guilt of Scandal, but cast it wholly upon Separation, and refusing to comply with the present Constitutions of the Church, since that is a direct giving offence to those which the Apostle chiefly respects in this prohibition, *i.e. the Church of God.*

I stay not now to give the notion of the Church: I doubt not but all contending Parties understand that competently well.

Nor to prove the present national Church of *England* to be justly called *the Church of God*: this (God be thanked) is fully done, against both the opposite Factions against her; those that call her Heretical or Schismatical,

matrical, on one hand ; and those that reproach her as Popish and Antichristian, on the other.

Were her present Constitutions to be tried by Apostolical and Primitive practice ; her Faith to be judged by that of the first Centuries, and four most truly General-Councils ; or her Liturgy and Discipline, her Rites, Ceremonies, and way of publick Worship, to be compared with what we can collect and judge of those purest times : Or were she to stand or fall by the judgement and suffrages of the most able and learned of Protestant Divines abroad since the Reformation ; she would not onely be justified, but commended ; not onely pass for a true and sound part of Christs Church, but the most sound and Orthodox, the most truly Primitive and Apostolical of any at this day on the face of the earth.

But I wave all this, and proceed to apply this Advice and Rule of *St. Paul* to our own Case, as it is at this day, with respect to Scandal, and the danger of it, by conforming to the Church ; which is plainly this.

The Church of *England* having reformed it self from those Corruptions that had sullied the truth and beauty of Christian Doctrine and Worship ; not by Noise and Tumult, and popular Faction, which too much influenced some forein Reformations, but upon grave and sober advice, with the concurrence of the lawful Civil Power ; digested her Doctrinals into such a number of Articles, as she judged most consonant to the Faith and Doctrine of the Apostles and first Councils : established such a Form of Worship, as upon most diligent enquiry and search, she found most agreeable to the practice of pure and Primitive Ages ; and retained onely such Rites and Usages as she found most ancient, and freest from any just and reasonable Exceptions and Abuses.

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All these thus constituted and framed, she imposeth as Conditions of her Communion, and requires Conformity unto of all her Members. She will be grievously offended if any of her Children reject, and comply not with this Constitution, as knowing her Knowledge and Integrity questioned, her Authority despised, and that Power that hath confirmed all this, condemned by so doing.

On the other hand, there are some particular men, some Hereticks, some Schismaticks, some either designing or less instructed persons, that declare themselves offended by conforming to this Constitution.

The question now is, how we shall govern our selves, and which of these Considerations we will permit to sway us: Whether respect to the Church and just Authority, and fear of giving offence thereto, shall engage us to conform; or whether respect to some private persons, and fear of offending and angring them, shall cause us to cast off all regard to those Laws and Constitutions, and all care to comply with them.

This is the plain Case; and were there no other Considerations to determine us, (when yet there are many) I would desire nothing plainer than the direction of the Apostle in this Text; where he tells us, that the persons we ought chiefly to have a care not to give offence unto, are *the Church of God*. If some private persons and the Church come in competition, and we must needs offend some, we ought to have a greater respect to the Church, than unto them. And were it truly giving them offence, (which yet it is not) yet were it so, I say, we ought not to attend so to that Consideration, as to cast off all regard and care to the Church of Christ.

This (I think) is a Rule so very reasonable at the very hearing of, and so fair upon its own reasons, that I do
not

not know whether it be really worth while to go to adde any strength to it: We might venture it to its own strength to stand or fall, and may challenge any one to assault or undertake it.

Yet however, I shall proceed to enlarge a little more upon it, and to adde some Considerations which may make it something more popularly plain and convincing.

I. And first, I desire to have it fairly considered, whether we ought not to have at least as fair a respect to the *Church of God*, as to any private persons, of what character or denomination soever.

I do not see upon what reasons any person can deny this to me, especially in a case where we cannot charge the Church with any plain degeneracy, or open Apostacy from the Doctrine or Practice of the Scriptures.

When any particular Church degenerates plainly either in Doctrine or Worship, there I am not concerned to determine how far she forfeits all that respect that she might otherwise claim from men, nor how much the Credit of a single person may vie with her. Perhaps when the Church was degenerated into *Arrianism*, the judgement of *Atbanasius*, and some few other Bishops, was more to be regarded than that of a whole Synod; and in the horrid Apostacy of the *Roman Church*, perhaps the single Doctrine of *John Huss* was preferable to that of the whole Council of *Constance*. But still in both these Cases (or any other parallel ones) that respect derived it self not from their persons, but was wholly owing to truth, and the holy Scriptures that stood with them.

But blessed be God, this is not our case; our Church doth challenge and triumph over all charges of any such Apostacy; and all the disputes and contests with her by any of these men, are about things confessedly doubtful, and

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such as are in their own nature indifferent ; things about which (to say the least) it is as possible that single persons may erre and mistake, as it is for the Church ; unless in this also (as in many other instances) men fall in with the grossest Tenet in Popery, that single persons may more reasonably pretend to Infallibility than the whole Church.

Every man derides, and thinks he can baffle all the pretences of the Bishop of *Rome* to Infallibility , and therefore should blush and be ashamed of his own either arrogating it to himself, or ascribing it to another. For, the truth is, I do not see but his pretences are as just as another man's, *i. e.* indeed they are both monstrously unreasonable.

And yet alas this is not the least source of the unhappiness of this Age ; nor need I be condemned for staying a little while to drop a tear upon it. Men turn Dictators in Religion, and impose their own Dreams as magisterially upon their Followers, as if they were oracular ; and I am perswaded, their Disciples hang as much upon their single authority and confidence, and yield as absolute and implicate Faith to all their Doctrines, as ever any poor Papists , against whom they exclaim so tragically for blind Obedience and Faith : They are kept in as absolute subjection to their *placits*, and dare no more read and consult Books that are written to inform them , than a poor Papist dare let a prohibited Book be seen in his House, by a Father of the Inquisition.

If ever people followed their leaders blindfold, these men do : they will not hear any thing against them ; They *have their persons in admiration* ; and I wish I could not say of some, *for filthy lucre's sake*, or at least some mean reasons equivalent thereto. They will not so much as submit to means of Information ; they commonly say they are satisfied already ; and the single blustering

stering of one of their own Rabbies, shall signifie more with them, than all the Arguments of the most Learned and sober men living beside.

But I am insensibly drawn aside from my chief Subject, which is not to treat so much of a respect of Credit and Faith, as of Tenderneſs and Charity; which is certainly as juſtly due from us to the Church, as to any private perſons whatſoever; and it cannot but be as unreaſonable to fail in the one, as in the other. It is every whit as unjuſt for men to be more regardleſs of grieving and troubling the Church of Chriſt, as it is fooliſh and unreaſonable to ſet up one ſingle man's opinion againſt that of many others, that are in the ſame circumſtances and advantages of Knowledge, and every way both as knowing and as upright as himſelf.

Whatever conſiderations there are to determine our Charity to ſingle perſons, there are the ſame (at leaſt) to make it neceſſary towards the Church, and as ſtrong reaſons to reſtrain us from offending the one, as the other: Whatever becomes an Argument in one caſe, is equally ſo alſo in the other; and if it be not as effectual with us, we are partial in the Law, and diſtinguiſh without any reaſons, but thoſe of our own partial and unjuſt reſpects.

Let men be pleaſed to look into the Scriptures, and conſult the practices of our Lord himſelf, or his Apoſtles after him, and their thoughts will ſoon be reſolved in this matter; they will find the one calling for as much deference and reſpect to the Church, as to private perſons, and the other upon all occaſions as careful to pay it; and in all caſes extreamly careful not to give offence to it in any thing whatſoever; as were eaſie to ſhew in Inſtances enough that are plain and obvious to all that read, and can ſcarce paſs unobſerved by any.

This is the firſt Conſideration; and I appeal to all, if

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it be not a very easie *Postulatum*, a very modest and reasonable intimation: and yet (I assure you) it were a good point gained, and a very good step towards our peace, were men hearty in their concessions of it. Would men pay but the same deference to the Church of Christ, and her Constitutions, as they readily do to their own single Opinions, or the confident suggestions of some admired Leader, we might quickly hope to see some end of our Questions and Disputes: And would they be but as tender of giving any offence to the Publick, as they are of doing so to every little person of their own party, we might begin to hope, that the Constitutions of our Church might gain some respect, and some measure of peaceableness and modesty bless the Inhabitants of this Nation once more.

2. But this is too little to suggest, and the lesser part of what I would propose to consideration upon this Subject: and therefore in the second place, I desire it may be considered, whether we ought not to have a greater respect to the Church of God, than to any single or private persons whatsoever.

And truly I think this is as reasonable a *Postulatum* as the other, and that which will be as soon granted true by all that duly consider things. In all things whatsoever, the Publick requires more respect from us than any private person; and the welfare of the one, is to be preferred by us before that of the other.

If the Church of Christ and any private Party of men come in competition, and it so happen, that we probably may give offence to one, we ought to let our regard to the Church sway and determine us, and think it a less evil that some particular persons be offended, than that trouble or offence be given to the whole Church.

That saying of *Caiaphas*, recorded *Joh. 11.50.* though spoken with an unjust and barbarous design, yet is a certain

certain and rational truth : *It is expedient that one man suffer, and not the whole Nation perish*: And it is certainly a less evil to grieve or offend some private persons, than to trouble and disturb, and endanger the Constitution of the whole Church ; which we must needs do, if at every private persons pleasure, we take upon us a liberty to dispense with the Commands and Institutions of it.

And this is a Rule that not only all wise Nations, but even all men still act by, in Cases that are any way like to this.

All Nations prefer the Publick good before the Private: and think it much better, that some single persons suffer inconvenience, than that the Publick be endangered ; and have ever set the worst Characters upon those men, that have sacrificed the good of their Country to their own private Ambition and Revenge ; and never regarded what Confusion and Mischief thus bring upon it, so they may please and gratifie their own Passions. All the world hath ever hated and reproached these as Monsters of men, and I hope we in time shall learn to do so also.

Nay, we see nothing more common among the wisest Nations, than to punish single persons for the correction and good of the whole; and many times to cut off those, whose crimes in their own nature were not so great, and who seemed fairly capable of mercy, onely to be Examples and Warnings to others, and to deter them from any thing by which the Publick might be endangered, and which were but the least steps to the dissolution of its Government.

And we shall see all men act by this Rule too, in their own concerns, even any of our dissenting Brethren themselves. They do not suffer every particular person to neglect, and speak against their establishments,
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but chuse rather to punish and molest them, than endanger their whole Constitution.

And they prefer their own Body, and the health of it, before any particular Member: they readily gash and cut one, to save all; yea, and will have a putrid and mortified Member taken off, rather than it shall endanger the good of the whole Body. So true is it, that the more Publick good ought to be preferred to the more private, and that all men naturally yield a greater respect to the whole Society, than they do to any single Member of it.

And that the same Rule ought to be observed by us in our present Case of giving Offence, I shall endeavour to make evident, both by plain Warrant of Scripture, and by some proper Considerations, which all men allow the reasonableness of in other cases.

I. I begin first with searching what warrant for this we can find in holy Scripture, either in the Precepts and Directions of it, or in the Lives and Actions of those who are proposed there to our imitation.

And first, as for Precept and Direction, I think that of *St. Paul, Gal. 6. 10.* to be very plain, and a firm foundation for what I am upon: *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those of the household of faith.* Where it is plain, the Apostle not only allows, but enjoyns us to make a difference in our Charity, and to shew this upon all occasions, rather to *the household of Faith, (i. e. to the Church of God)* than to any other person or persons whatsoever.

This place is full, and directly comes up to our present Case, and the pretences made about it: For Charity is as direct and plain a duty, as the not giving offence; it is as strictly enjoyned as the other; and the neglect of Charity is as severely threatned, as the giving Offence is, or can be: And yet for all this, when
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the Church of Christ, and any other persons whatever, come in competition, and are Candidates for our Charity, we ought to shew it unto that, and not unto these. And the same reasons that determine thus our Charity, will determine as well our care of not giving Offence; especially since this is a proper and principal act of Charity, and no one (that I know of) more so.

This will be a sufficient answer to all the tragical stories of the sin of Scandal, and the great necessity of not giving it to any.

We are expressly charged *not to give Offence*; and so we are expressly charged *above all things to put on Charity*.

In giving Offence, we must have a regard to the meanest person in the Church, and a woe is denounced against him that *offends a little one*. And so we are in charity commanded too, and a woe threatned to him that *shuts up his bowels of Compassion* from the meanest servant of God. Yea, this is commanded even to the creatures below us.

And yet for all this, we must prefer the Church before all others; and if it should so happen, that Charity could not be shewed unto both, we ought to determine our respects and Charity to the Church, and to suspend the acts of it unto the others; and must do so too in our Charity of not offending or grieving the Church, unless some disproportion could be shewed in this from the other acts of Charity, or some reasons here to alter the case; which, I am very sure, cannot. This place alone, if there were none others, sufficiently determines this Case.

And that we are warranted also by the Precedents of the New Testament to act by this Rule, the actions of those great men whose lives are there recorded for our imitation, do shew us.

The Life of our blessed Saviour is a good example for
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us in this, as well as in all other instances of duty that are incumbent on us: We find him in every thing paying a mighty deference to the Church of the Jews, and studiously avoiding to give any displeasure or offence unto them; and this in many things which they themselves had introduced, without any express Warrant or Command from God; as were easie to shew, and hath been by many learned men of late.

But there is one instance which comes pretty well up to our present case; and that is his paying Tribute, of which you have the story, *Matth. 17. 27.* there is no doubt but by this he might give some offence (in this loose notion of offence) *i. e.* occasion some trouble in his followers, by owning himself a stranger, and paying Tribute as such; nevertheless he chose to do that, rather than to give any offence to the Publick: *Notwithstanding, that we offend them not, &c.*

Whether the persons he was so careful here not to offend were the *Roman* Government, or the Church of the *Jews*, it is all one to our present Case. If it were the Church of the *Jews*, then we see he was more careful not to offend them than his own Followers. But if it were the Government of the *Romans*, it concludes more strongly for us and for our present Case, where the Government is Christian, and that of the Church and of the Kingdom one and the same; where we cannot offend the Church, but we must offend the Government and Civil Power too, under whose protection and favour it is established, and whose Canons it hath adopted into its own Laws.

After this great example, I proceed to take notice of some that we find registred in the life of *St. Paul* to the like purpose. I instance onely in two, which will be sufficient.

The first was his *circumcising Timothy*, of which you have

have the story, *Acts* 16. 1, 2, 3. It is certain, *Timothy* might have objected against Circumcision, and pleaded his freedom from any obligation to it, being the Son of a *Grecian* Father ; and there is no reason to doubt but it must be irksome and troublesome to him : yet for all that, *St. Paul* hath greater respect to the Church of the *Jews* in those parts, which might be offended, had he not been circumcised, his Mother being a Jew.

The other is that famous story of *St. Paul's shaving his head and purifying himself in the Temple* with the men that had a vow upon them, just according to the manner prescribed in the Levitical Law : you have the account of it *Acts* 21. from 23, to 27.

I do not at all question, but this action of *St. Paul* must be strangely looked upon at first by *Trophimus*, and those other Heathen Converts that came with him to *Jerusalem*, who knowing his Doctrine, and manner of conversation abroad, could scarce chuse but reflect with some trouble upon this action ; and the truth is, it was a plain temptation to them to have some hard thoughts of him. Yet notwithstanding this, *St. Paul* preferred his respect to the Church of *Jerusalem*, and chose rather to incur this censure of theirs, than to give any offence to the Church of Christ which was there.

From which example a great advantage may be drawn, not onely to direct us what regard to have to the Church of God in general, above any private persons ; but even to a National or Local Church, which is but a member and part of Christs Church, and from which, the constitution of other Churches as to Customs and Usages may be different.

St. Paul might have pleaded strongly against this thing, to which *St. James* advised him, especially upon the account of offence to those that were with him, and to others from whom he came; yet for all this, his respect

to the present Church where he was, and his care not to offend it, overcame all other considerations, and caused him readily to do that, which neither they were greatly pleased with, nor himself in all probability neither.

Which hath often brought to my mind, the Apostolical temper of St. *Ambrose*, in that famous answer of his to St. *Austin's* Mother; which he magnifies so highly for Oracular and Divine; *That at Millain he did not observe the Sabbath-fast, because it was not the usage of his Church; but at Rome he did, because it was the custom there*: advising her in all such things, to make the custom of the present Church her Precedent and Rule, and by no means to give any offence to it.

By both which notable Examples, we may learn by what measure to govern our selves in these things; namely, a respect to the Usages and Constitutions of the present Church we are in, provided they be not sinful, and plainly contrary to any Law of God: for of such things I am speaking all this while, and about such things it is that our present dispute about giving offence is by both sides acknowledged to be.

I onely add one thing more, before I leave this Precedent, That if we ought to have this great and over-ruling respect to any National Church of Christ, to which we chance to come, and in which we sojourn, we certainly ought much more to have the same to our own National Church, in which we not onely live, but were born and baptised Members of; and therefore suffer our regard to it to over-rule all other respects to private persons that may interfere with it.

These things might be enough to assure the reasonableness of the present Consideration; and I do not see what can well be objected against them.

2. And yet I shall proceed to some Popular Considerations here also, which are owned for sound and good
Rules

Rules to act by in all other like Cases, by all sorts of men ; and which, when applyed in our Case, will presently determine it our concern and duty , to have greater care not to give offence to the Church of God, than to any private persons.

Four of these I shall just mention, and leave to take effect by our leisurely consideration of them.

1. That offending the Church , is offending the greater party : I hope, I may say, not onely greater than any other single denomination of men, but than all of them together.

I know how forward each party hath been to boast its number , and some to threaten Authority with their strength ; and to that purpose, to make false musters, and great shews ; to crowd together upon all occasions, and to make it piacular for one to be absent , when either the Party or the Cause was to be credited.

But thanks be to God, that we have publick evidences now, and of late, that the Church-party is not so small and inconsiderable as some men would have it thought to be.

It is true, honest men are not apt to be noisie and tumultuous ; the sense of their own Integrity satisfieth them, and the assurance that they are known to God, is to them more than Ten thousand witnesses. They do not use to boast of themselves, nor court greatly man's observance ; they keep their station, and use not to run from place to place ; an art by which the same man may appear ten or twenty ; and this perhaps hath made some good men fearful, and some others confident : But thanks be to God, they know one another better now, and have signalized their numbers to material purposes.

Now this ought to be a swaying consideration with

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all scrupulous persons in this case. In all others, it is thought safest to offend the lesser party, supposing them but in the same circumstances with others: And when a Dissenter considers that by Conforming, he can but offend some few of his own small party, or at most but some few of others, but by his Separation shall certainly offend the whole Church, methinks it should soon teach him which side of the Question to chuse.

Unless those few must be counted the onely wise, and the onely good, the sober and the godly party; and the whole Church be disparaged, as consisting onely of ignorant and loose, silly and dissolute persons.

When, blessed be God, plain experience contradicts both, and shews them to be equal at least to their supercilious accusers, both for knowledge and virtue; and there is nothing to make them appear otherwise, but onely the Pride and Uncharitableness of some men, whose interest it is to have them believed to be so. *But Wisdom is justified in her Children.*

2. Offending the Church of Christ must needs be of worse consequence than offending any private party of men. I need not stay to remark each single instance in which this is evident, every man's reason will suggest enough to him.

Neither God, nor Religion, can be so much concerned in the one, as in the other; nor can the Souls of men, or the peace of the World, be so much endangered by private offences, as by those against the publick Church: Mens guilts are higher and more injurious to themselves, and the effects are more dangerous and mischievous to others: which is another good consideration to sway men in this case.

For a wise man will weigh the probable effects of what he doth; and where an honest and uninstructed man

man is uncertain whether he may do or forbear such things, and after his enquiry remains scrupulous and unresolved, it is a good means to determine himself by, to consider as well as he can what the effects and consequences of what he is going to do or forbear, in all likelihood will be; and that which he sees attended with a train of the worse, and more mischievous consequences, disargues it self, and pronounceth its own condemnation: And by these effects he may make as true a difference, as if the plain essence and nature of the things were naked unto his view.

3. Offending the Church of God, is offending those to whom we owe more duty than we do unto any private party whatsoever.

I confess, charity and respect, and all the possible instances of it, we owe to every private person with whom we converse, and to whom we are any way related; and God hath made all this, matter of plain duty.

But it is a great deal more than this, that we owe those that are *over us in the Lord*, and his whole Church; even as much more as we owe of deference and Duty, of Obedience and Submission to a Father and a Governour, and those that God and Nature hath set above us, above that common Charity and Duty that we are to owe to one that is in all respects our equal.

The Laws of all Nations consider us under greater obligations to our Parents, and to our Country, than to any single persons whatsoever; and make injuring of a Father or our Prince, more heinous than doing the same to a common person upon the same level with us.

And I am sure the Laws of God, and Religion too, considering us as Members of the Church, and calling
the

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the Governours of it our *Fathers in Christ*, let us know what great duty we owe to them; and of how much greater guilt it must needs be, to offend them, than our Fellow-christian, or any Party in which we can be engaged. There is a complication of sins and guilt in the one, when there is but the breach of common charity in the other.

I deny not but men may joyn themselves to such a Party, and make another man their Guide; and commit themselves to the Conduct of him, and thereby oblige themselves to more duty than they owe to others. But this is duty of their own choice, and the failure in it a sin of their own causing; and doth no more supercede their original and primer obligations, which God and Nature had layd on them, than the being faithful to a company of *Banditti* will excuse disloyalty to our Prince and Country; or than giving a gift to the *Corban* among the *Jews*, would atone undutifulness to a wanting Parent.

However men may divide themselves from the Church, of which Providence and Religion have made them Members, and enter themselves into separate Factions; yet they must remember that they owe duty to it still; that no voluntary and second Compacts of their own, can dissolve their primitive Obligations; or their care to continue faithful to the one, expiate their regardless offending of the other: for they do owe more duty to the one than to the other; what they pretend to owe to one, is contracted by themselves; but what they owe to the other, is bound on them by the sacred and strong ties of Religion and Providence.

And this is another good Argument to determine a scrupulous person in this matter: If he be in doubt which he had best to offend, the Church of Christ, or his own private Party, and know not by what considerations to deter-

determine his resolution; let him in Gods name consider to which he owes most; what the Laws of God make his duty to the one more than to the other; and then, if he be honest and single-eyed, he will soon be able to resolve his scruple, and know what choice he ought to make.

4. Offending the Church of God is truly a grievous Scandal, and an Offence, in the true Gospel-notion of it; but the offending particular persons may possibly not be so.

That which I mean is this; the Church of God we may be sure will not take offence but upon just reason; but other men may call that an offence to them, which really is not. If we do that which grieves and injureth the whole Church, then we do properly offend, and are guilty of Scandal in the true notion of it. But if we onely offend some private persons of our own party, they may call that an offence which is not so: For every grieving (and offending of another in that sense of the word) is not a formal Scandal, as I hinted before, and hath been since this, made clear by a better Pen.

And to apply this to our present matter in debate, this is really so in our Case of Conformity: the refusal of it, and separating our selves from the Communion of the Church, is truly that giving of offence which the Gospel condemns; it is laying a snare in the way of men, intrapping them into that damnable sin of Schism; it is an obstructing the effect of Religion, and a direct hinderance of that Concord and Love, that Unanimity and Peace, that it so strictly calls for among Christians, and designs to render the World happy by.

But you may challenge any dissenting person to shew
how

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how angering some private persons, and a single party of Schismatics, can be a Scandal to them; or to name any one sin that it is temptation to them to commit, and to instance that prejudice or disservice that it doth to Christian Religion.

It is possible (I must confess) that grief and anger at such a persons Conformity, may irritate and provoke men to some things that are evil. But then I say that this is the fault of them that are angry, and not his, with whom they are causelessly offended; it may be taking an offence on their parts, but not giving it by him. For if we must call every thing an offence, that any man doth pervert into an occasion of evil, there will scarce any, no not the best actions of men, escape that deromination.

This methinks is a very material consideration, and ought always to sway with men in this Case; and if men could not determine themselves in it by other Reasons, yet they might by this: They should consider which is most likely to judge truest what is Scandal, and what is not; and when both sides say they are offended, which is likely to be so indeed.

Particular persons, and Parties of men may mistake, and it is notorious, often do call that an Offence and Scandal, which is not so. But the whole Church is not so like to take cognizance of, and be offended publicly with any thing which doth not deserve that name. To which we may cast in this consideration, to add weight to the other: Every offence to a single private person or persons, is not the sin of Scandal; but no man can offend the Church of God, but he sins grievously, and is directly guilty of a great Scandal.

To conclude, the sum of all that I would have considered on this Subject, is this.

I. That

1. That the fear of giving offence to weak and uninstru-
cted persons by Conformity to our Church, and re-
turning to the Communion of it, is causeless, and whol-
ly without any just reason : Conformity being neither a
sin, nor causal of any, nor any just cause of offence to a-
ny persons whatsoever.

2. That it is now matter of plain and indispenfible
duty, tied on us by the Commands and Laws both of
God and man, and therefore carefully to be done, what-
ever may be the consequences of it to others : That no
fnares or possibilities of offence to some men by it ought
to supersede our care, or can atone the sin of negle-
cting of it : That we cannot forbear it now, for fear
of offending others, without grievously offending our
selves, and our own Consciences.

3. That our refusing to Conform, will greatly of-
fend the Church of God; and indeed it doth so : Not
onely our own National Church of *England*, but even
all the Reformed Churches abroad too, as may be seen
in some Declarations of the Great men among them of
late, who cannot but grieve to see their great Bulwark,
and the whole Reformation, so battered and weakened by
this means, and such great advantage thereby given to
the great Enemy against it.

And therefore that this consideration ought to pre-
ponderate all the scruples and fears, and fancied possibi-
lities of giving offence to private persons of our own
party by it.

And lastly, that the effect of all this, discover it self
in a speedy conscientious care, and honest endeavour to
put a period to our causeless Separations and Divisions,
which are the onely true Scandal and giving Offence that
I know of in this Case.

That we no longer go on madly to contrive our own Ruine, in pulling down those Walls, and making those Breaches in our Churches Banks, at which the Enemy may, and, without Gods immediate interposition, will suddenly break in as a mighty resistless torrent.

That we may all of us return to the Communion of the Church, whose Doctrine is Orthodox, and Government Apostolical, and whose terms of Communion none of us dare term sinful: In which we may acceptably serve our God, and happily save our own Souls; live happily, and die comfortably, and pass into the Communion of that Church Triumphant above, which sings incessant Hallelujahs to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. To whom let us also give all possible praise and Thanksgiving, both now and for evermore. *Amen.*

FINIS.

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